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(54) **METHOD, SYSTEM, AND DEVICE FOR CONDUCTING A GAMBLING GAME TO ISSUE AN ESCROW AWARD**

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(51) **Int. Cl.**

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A63F 13/00	(2014.01)
G06F 17/00	(2006.01)
G06F 19/00	(2011.01)
G07F 17/32	(2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ***G07F 17/3244*** (2013.01); ***G07F 17/3211*** (2013.01)

USPC **463/20**; 463/16; 463/25; 463/26; 463/32; 463/34

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

USPC 463/16, 20, 25, 26, 32, 34

See application file for complete search history.

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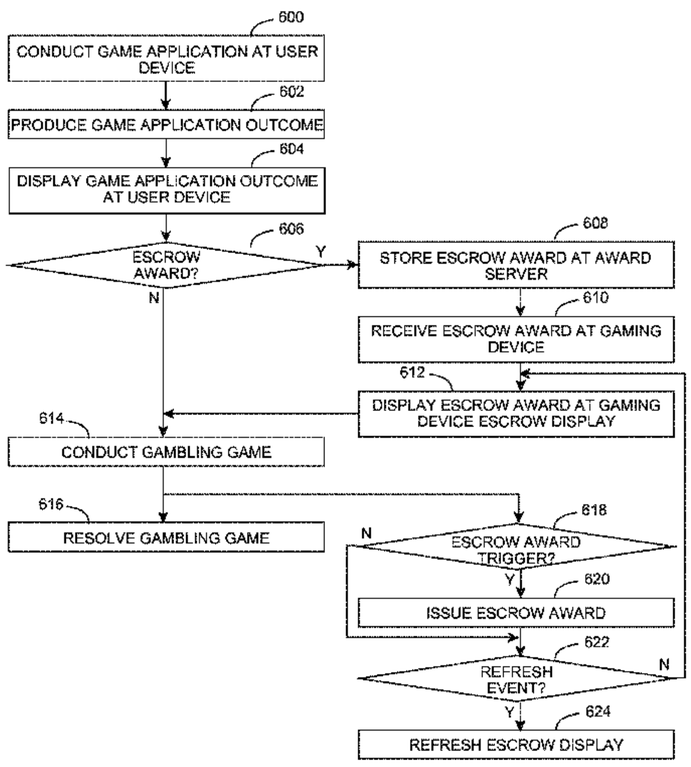
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A user device is programmed to display a game application outcome. Among the possible outcomes is at least one escrow award which may be earned through the game application but is not issued at the user device. When an escrow award is earned, it is stored at an award server, optionally in association with a player identifier. A gaming device includes a primary display for displaying a gambling game and an escrow display to display escrow awards retrieved from the award server (optionally in response to receipt of a player identifier). A gambling game is conducted and resolved. Through the course of conducting one or more gambling games, a determination is made whether an escrow award trigger has occurred and, if so, an escrow award is issued. Optionally, an escrow award is held at the escrow display until an escrow display refresh event.

27 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



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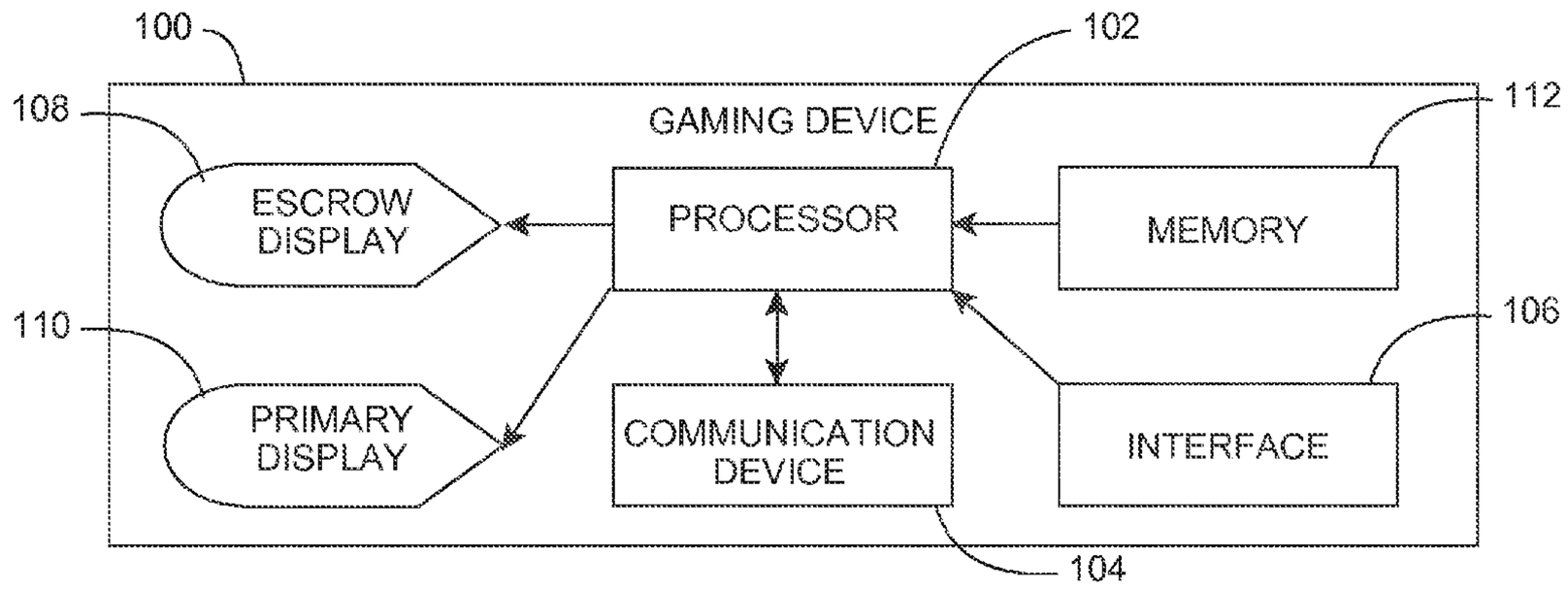

FIG. 1

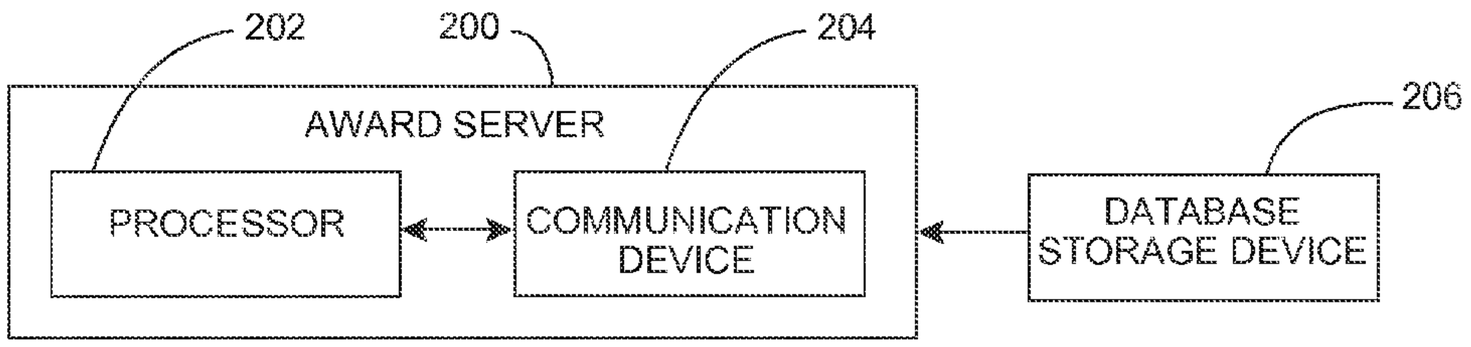

FIG. 2

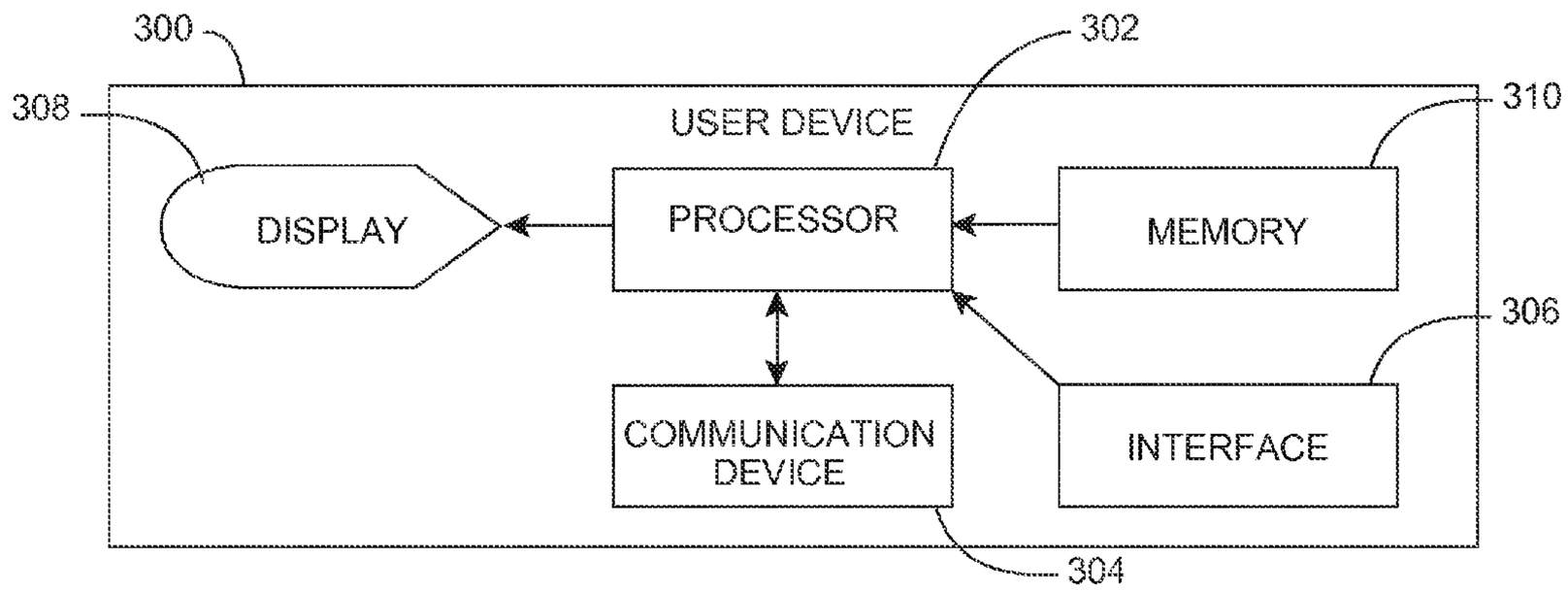

FIG. 3

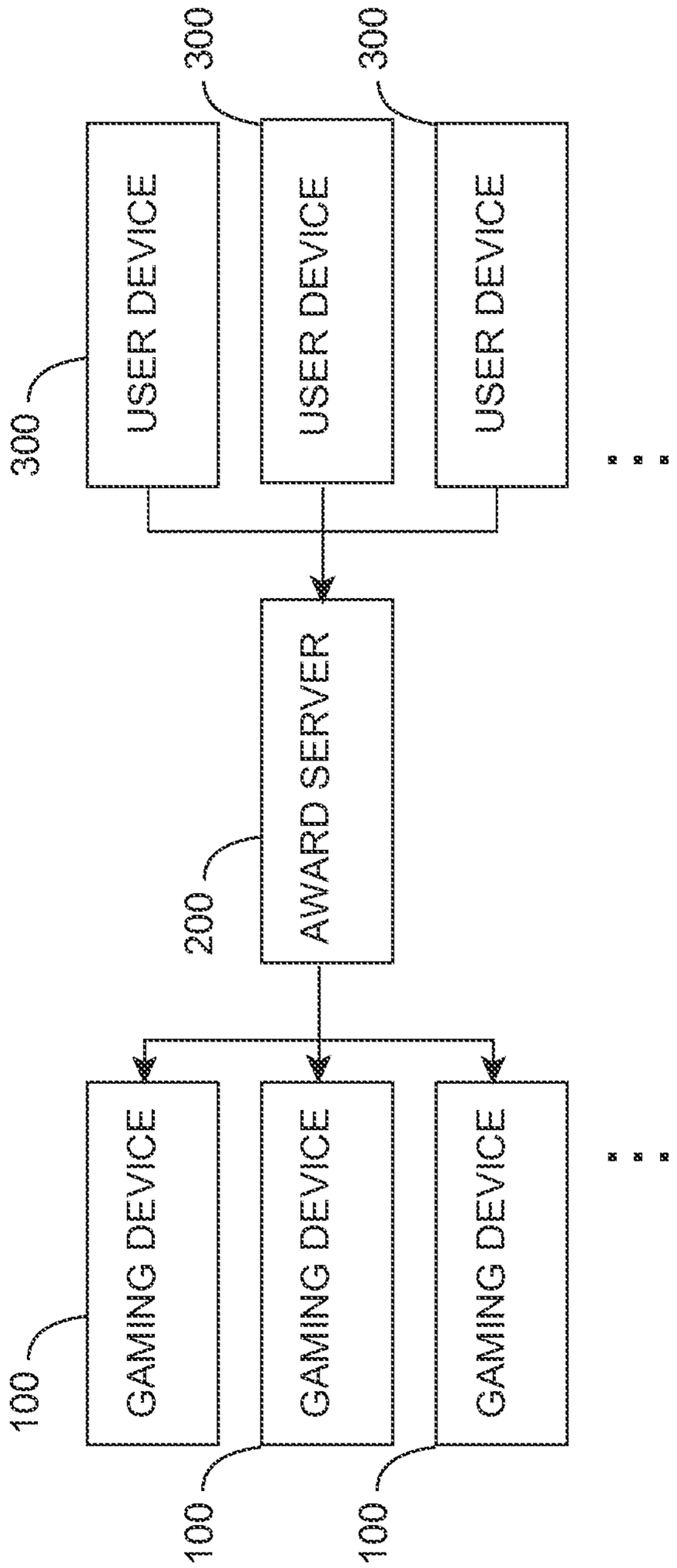
GAMING DEVICE
GAMING DEVICE
GAMING DEVICE
100
100
100
AWARD SERVER
200
USER DEVICE
USER DEVICE
USER DEVICE
300
300
300

FIG. 4

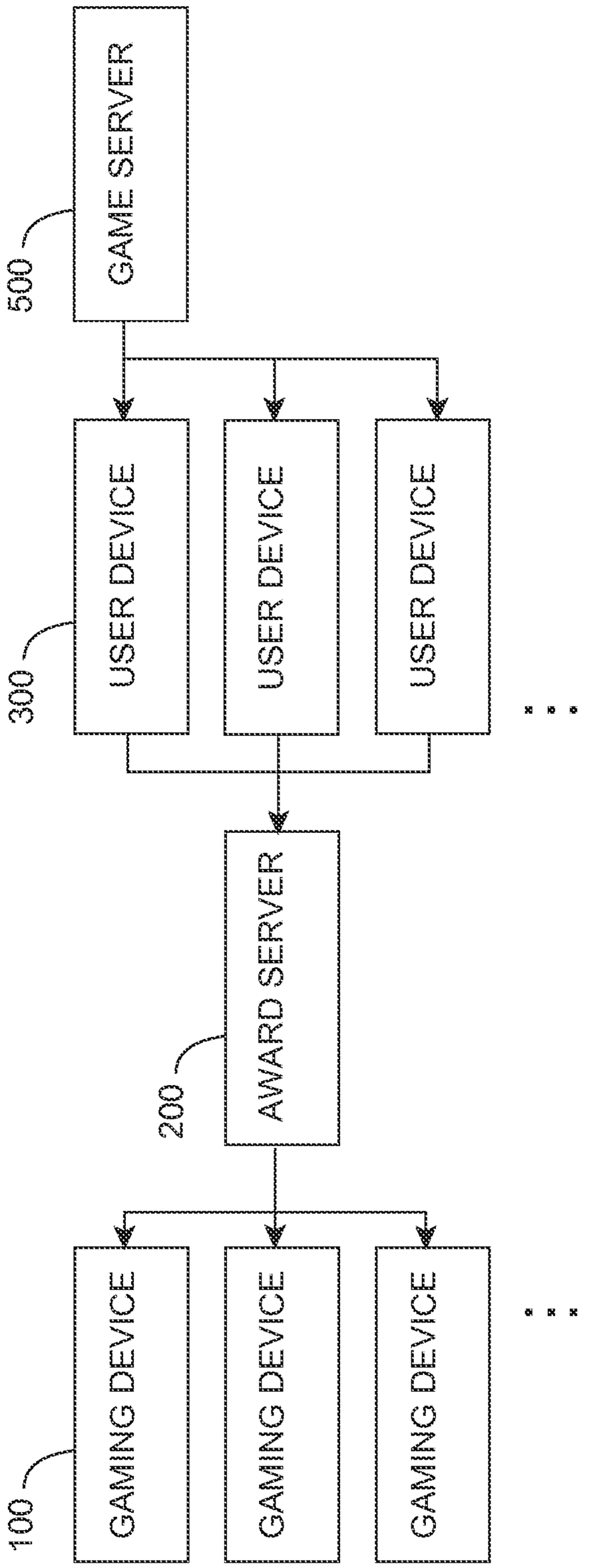
GAME SERVER
500
USER DEVICE
USER DEVICE
USER DEVICE
300
AWARD SERVER
200
GAMING DEVICE
GAMING DEVICE
GAMING DEVICE
100

FIG. 5

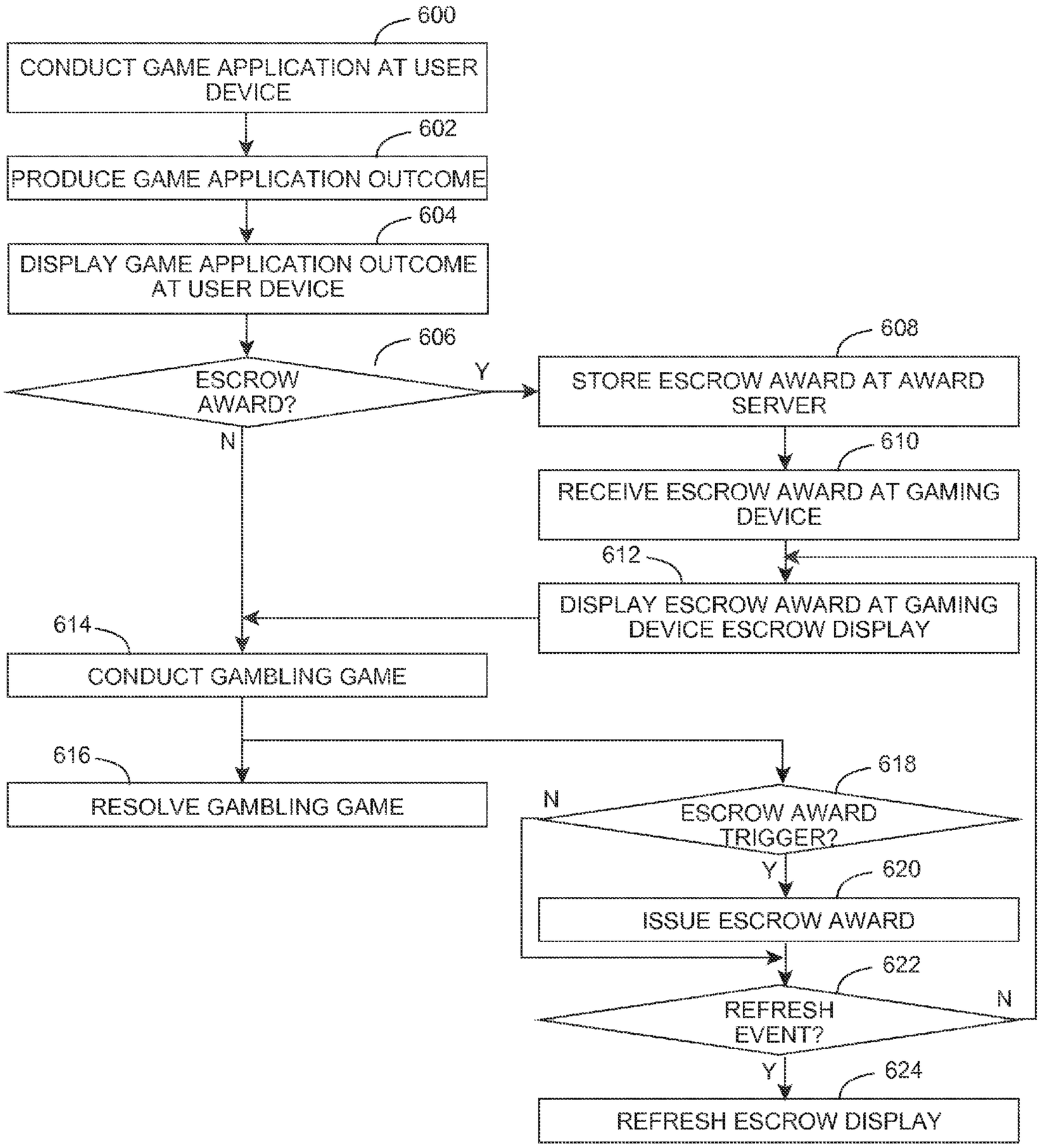
600
CONDUCT GAME APPLICATION AT USER DEVICE
602
PRODUCE GAME APPLICATION OUTCOME
604
DISPLAY GAME APPLICATION OUTCOME AT USER DEVICE
606
ESCROW AWARD?
Y
N
608
STORE ESCROW AWARD AT AWARD SERVER
610
RECEIVE ESCROW AWARD AT GAMING DEVICE
612
DISPLAY ESCROW AWARD AT GAMING DEVICE ESCROW DISPLAY
614
CONDUCT GAMBLING GAME
616
RESOLVE GAMBLING GAME
618
ESCROW AWARD TRIGGER?
N
Y
620
ISSUE ESCROW AWARD
622
REFRESH EVENT?
N
Y
624
REFRESH ESCROW DISPLAY

FIG. 6

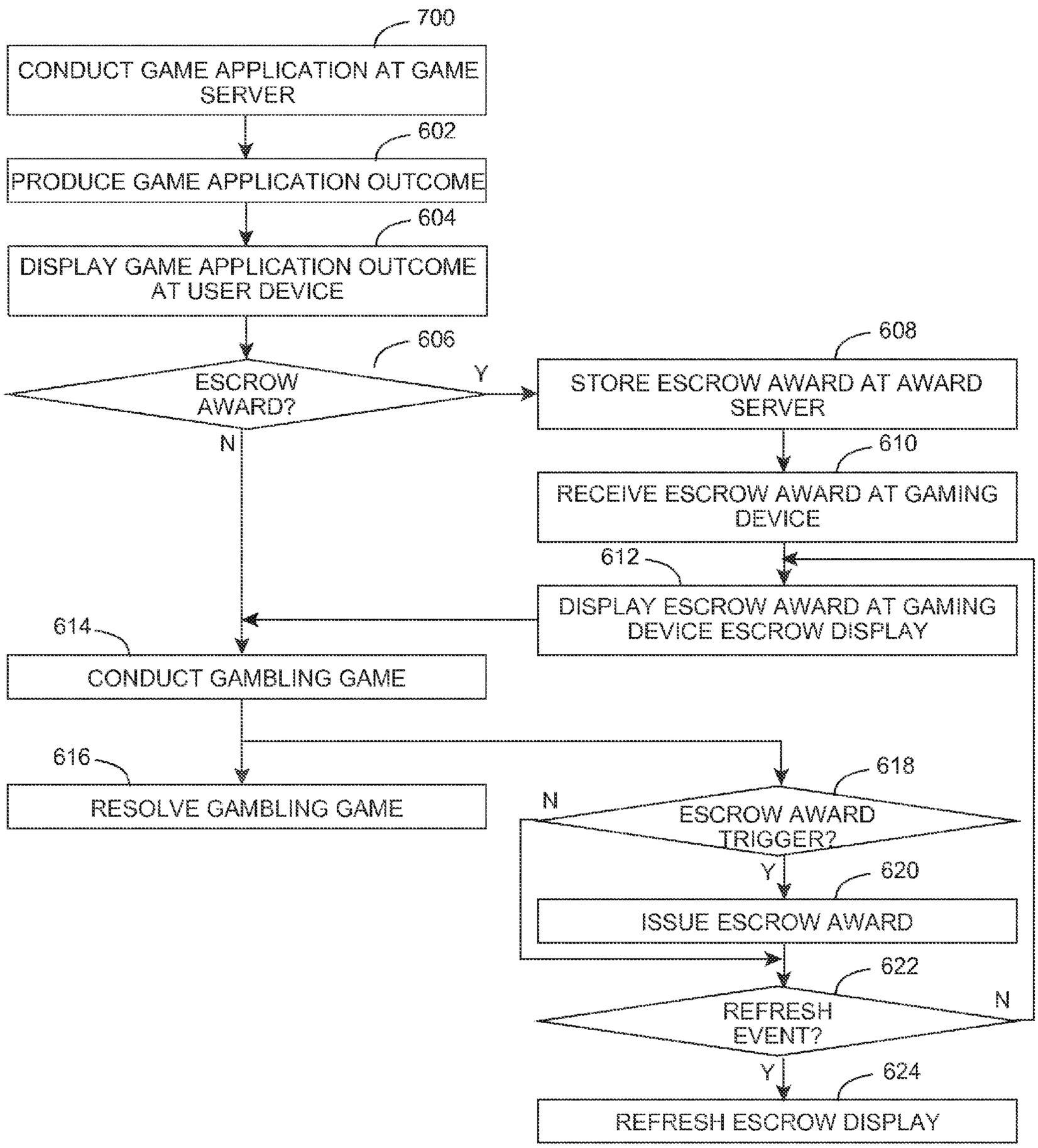
700
CONDUCT GAME APPLICATION AT GAME SERVER
602
PRODUCE GAME APPLICATION OUTCOME
604
DISPLAY GAME APPLICATION OUTCOME AT USER DEVICE
606
ESCROW AWARD?
Y
N
608
STORE ESCROW AWARD AT AWARD SERVER
610
RECEIVE ESCROW AWARD AT GAMING DEVICE
612
DISPLAY ESCROW AWARD AT GAMING DEVICE ESCROW DISPLAY
614
CONDUCT GAMBLING GAME
616
RESOLVE GAMBLING GAME
618
ESCROW AWARD TRIGGER?
N
Y
620
ISSUE ESCROW AWARD
622
REFRESH EVENT?
N
Y
624
REFRESH ESCROW DISPLAY

FIG. 7

METHOD, SYSTEM, AND DEVICE FOR CONDUCTING A GAMBLING GAME TO ISSUE AN ESCROW AWARD

RELATED APPLICATION DATA

The present application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/827,574, entitled "Method and Device for Issuing a Bonus Award," filed Jul. 11, 2007, and a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/900,277, entitled "Gaming System and Method of Operation," filed Sep. 10, 2007.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to methods, systems, and devices for conducting wagering games. More specifically, the present invention includes methods, systems, and devices for receiving an escrow award from an award server at a gaming device which, in turn, received the escrow award from a user device, such that an escrow award that is earned, but not issued at a user device, is available to be awarded at a gaming device.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Gaming devices take many forms, such as video gaming devices which conduct video reel slot machine games or video card games, mechanical slot machines, electronic table games, or the like. However, all these gaming devices issue awards similarly. That is, the awards are issued to the player in currency or a form representing currency.

For example, in a typical gaming device, currency is deposited into the gaming device via a bill acceptor, or a voucher representing currency is deposited into the gaming device via a ticket receiver. The amount deposited is tracked as gaming credits in a credit register in the gaming device. Casino gaming devices are well known in the art. Such devices may be embodied as spinning reel slot machines, video slot machines, video poker machines or the like. These machines are played by a player making a wager and prompting play. A game processor, such as a computer processor, selects and displays an outcome. In a typical slot machine, card game machine, or the like, the processor selects and displays an outcome by randomly selecting and displaying game indicia (such as slot reel symbols, playing cards, or the like). A determination is made whether the outcome is a winning or losing outcome based on the combination of game indicia selected and displayed. Depending on the type of game, the combinations may be examined based on some predefined constraint such as predefined pay lines, or the like. While different games treat awards different, generally speaking, the player is rewarded for winning outcomes and winnings are added to the credit register. Losing outcomes usually result in the loss of the player's wager, e.g. the player's wager amount is retained by the gaming device. Upon completing a play session, the player depresses a "cash out" button and the balance in the credit register is provided to the player in the form of cash, coin, or, more commonly, a voucher.

It has become popular to provide gaming devices with secondary features, such as bonus games, side bets, bonus awards, secondary games, or the like. For example, in a conventional bonus feature gaming device, a player places a wager and plays a base game to conclusion. If the outcome of the base game includes a trigger condition, a bonus feature is enabled. The bonus feature may entail the display of bonus outcome selections where the player makes a selection to reveal a bonus. In another popular game, a bonus feature is embodied as an electro-mechanical wheel that spins to display a bonus amount.

Gaming devices often include displays of bonus award amounts to attract and entice players to the gaming device. However, most bonus award amounts in existing gaming devices are static, i.e., do not change. Those bonus award amounts that do change, do so because they are funded as progressive awards. Such progressive bonus award amounts constitute a progressive pool to which a portion of the player's wager is contributed. Thus, the progressive pool from which the progressive bonus award amount is derived, grows with each wager received for play of the game. The consequence of this is that, while progressive bonus award amounts change, they are (a) not personalized to the player and (b) are not based on the player's activity on the gaming device, let alone the player's activities outside the casino.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention includes a gaming system. In one optional embodiment, a gaming system includes a user device. Optionally, the user device includes a user device processor and a user device memory in communication with the user device processor. In one optional embodiment, the user device memory stores program instructions executable by the user device processor to display an outcome of a game application at the user device. In one such optional embodiment, the user device processor conducts the game application and displays the outcome at the user device. In another optional embodiment, the game application is conducted remotely and the outcome is transmitted to the user device processor, which displays the outcome at the user device. The outcome of the game application may include an escrow award. If the outcome of a game application includes an escrow award, the escrow award may be displayed at the user device. However, the user device does not issue the escrow award.

A system includes an award server in communication with the user device. In an optional embodiment, the award server includes an award server processor and an award server memory in communication with the award server processor. The award server memory stores program instructions executable by the award server processor to receive an escrow award from the user device. That is, rather than issuing any escrow award at a user device, the escrow award is stored at an award server for later application. In an optional embodiment, the award server stores the escrow award in association with a player identifier. Optionally, the award server may be configured to share and/or give escrow awards. For example, in one optional embodiment, the award server processor executes program instructions to receive a transfer request, e.g., a share request, including a first player identifier associated with an escrow award and a second player identifier. In response to the transfer request, the award server processor associates the escrow award with the second player identifier. In a further optional embodiment, the award server processor may disassociate the escrow award with the first player identifier in response to a transfer request, e.g., a gift request.

A system includes at least one gaming device in communication with the award server. The gaming device is separate from the award server and operates independently from the award server. Similarly, the gaming device is separate from the user device and operates independently from the user device.

A gaming device includes a gaming device processor. In an optional embodiment, the gaming device processor includes a

random number generator, to generate a random number used, at least in part, to generate an outcome for a gambling game. The gaming device also includes a gaming device interface and an escrow display, both of which are in communication with the gaming device processor.

The gaming device includes a gaming device memory in communication with the gaming device processor. In an optional embodiment, the gaming device memory stores at least one escrow award trigger and program instructions executable by the gaming device processor. In a further optional embodiment, the gaming device memory also stores at least one escrow display refresh event.

In one optional embodiment, the program instructions executable by the gaming device processor include receiving an escrow award from the award server. In an optional embodiment, the escrow award stored at the award server are each associated with a player identifier. In such an optional embodiment, a player identifier is received through the gaming device interface and the escrow award received from the award server is an escrow award associated with a player identifier received.

The escrow award is displayed on the escrow display and a wager on the gambling game is received through the gaming device interface. The gaming device processor conducts the gambling game. In an optional embodiment, conduct of the gambling game includes randomly selecting an outcome for the gambling game by the gaming device processor. The wager is resolved by the gaming device processor based on the outcome of the gambling game.

The gaming device processor determines whether the escrow award trigger has occurred. In one optional embodiment, the escrow award trigger may be determined, at least in part, by the outcome of the gambling game generated by the gaming device processor. In another optional embodiment, the escrow award trigger may be independent of the outcome of the gambling game generated by the gaming device processor. The escrow award is issued by the gaming device when the at least one escrow award trigger occurs.

In an optional embodiment, the escrow award is held at the escrow display until the occurrence of the at least one escrow award trigger. In another optional embodiment, the escrow award is held at the escrow display until the occurrence of the at least one escrow award trigger or an escrow display refresh event, whichever occurs first. Examples of escrow display refresh events may include a predefined quantity of gambling games such that the escrow award is available to be issued for only a predefined quantity of gambling games. Another example of an escrow display refresh event is a random quantity of gambling games such that the escrow award is available to be issued for only a random quantity of gambling games. Yet another example of an escrow display refresh event is removal of a player identifier such that the escrow award is available to be issued only in gambling games conducted while in receipt of the player identifier associated with the escrow award. In an optional embodiment, the escrow award is removed from the escrow display upon the occurrence of the at least one escrow award trigger or an escrow display refresh event, whichever occurs first. In another optional embodiment, the escrow award is removed from the escrow display only upon the occurrence of an escrow display refresh event. In yet another optional embodiment, the escrow award is removed from the escrow display only upon the occurrence of the at least one escrow award trigger.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a block diagram of a gaming device according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **2** is a block diagram of an award server according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **3** is a block diagram of a user device according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **4** is a block diagram of a system according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **5** is a block diagram of a system according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **6** is a flowchart of a method according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **7** is a flowchart of a method according to an embodiment of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION

Reference is now made to the figures wherein like parts are referred to by like numerals throughout. Referring generally to FIGS. **1-7**, the present invention is directed to methods, systems, and devices for conducting gaming. The invention includes one or more gaming devices **100**. The gaming device **100** may take any form. The gaming device **100** includes a gaming device processor **102** and a gaming device communication device **104** communicating with, and under the control of, the gaming device processor **102**. The gaming device processor **102** operates a random number generator; the random number generator may be hardware, software, an embedded device, a combination thereof, or the like. The gaming device communication device could take any form, such as a modem, router, hub, network interface card ("NIC") or other device adapted to transmit and receive data. In an optional embodiment, the gaming device additionally includes an gaming device interface **106** communicating with the gaming device processor **102**. The gaming device may include, or otherwise communicate with, an escrow display **108**. The escrow display **108** may be incorporated into a primary display **110** (i.e., the gaming device may include a single display) or may be separate from a primary display **110** (i.e., the gaming device may include two separate displays). In either case, the gaming device processor **102** may communicate directly with the escrow display **108** or may communicate with the escrow display via an intermediary controller, such as a video display card or the like.

The gaming device processor **102** communicates with gaming device memory **112** which stores program instructions to conduct a method as described in greater detail below. Additionally, the gaming device memory **112** may store parameters and other data to conduct a method, such as one or more escrow award triggers and one or more escrow display refresh events (described in greater detail below). In an optional embodiment, the gaming device **100** is configured to conduct a gambling game by receiving a wager (or designation of a wager) though the gaming device interface **106** and utilize a random number generator to produce an outcome, which is then displayed at the gaming device primary display **110**. A gaming device **100** may take any form, including a video gaming machine, a mechanical or electro-mechanical slot machine, electronic table system, video lottery terminal, handheld gaming device, or the like.

The gaming device **100** communicates with an award server **200**. In one optional embodiment, illustrated in FIG. **2**, an award server **200** includes an award server processor **202** in communication with an award server communication device **204**.

The award server **200** may optionally incorporate, or communicate with, a database storage device **206** that stores player records. For example, in an optional embodiment, the player records may be player tracking records (also referred

to as player accounts, player rewards accounts, player loyalty accounts, or the like). In one such optional embodiment, the player records may be accessible to the award server **200**. In a further optional embodiment, the award server **200** may be permitted to read from, write to, or read from and write to the player records.

Referring generally to FIG. **2**, the award server **200** may take any form. For example, in an optional embodiment, the award server **200** is a web server accessible through a world wide web of web servers on the Internet. Optionally, the award server **200** is a secure web server that is accessible through a predefined security protocol. Alternatively, the award server **200** is an unsecured web server that is openly accessible. In any case, the award server **200** communicates with the gaming device **100** by transmitting data to, and receiving data from, the gaming device **100**. The transmission and reception of data at the award server **200** may be conducted directly with the gaming device **100** or via a network. More specifically, the award server communication device **204** exchanges communication directly or indirectly with the gaming device communication device **104**.

More specifically, in one optional embodiment, the gaming device **100** may communicate directly to an award server **200** such as through a direct connection. For example, in one such optional embodiment, the gaming device **100** communicates directly with the award server **200**, such as through Bluetooth™, or other communication protocol.

In another optional embodiment, the gaming device **100** communicates to an award server **200** through a network, such as an intranet, local area network, wide area network, virtual private network ("VPN"), or other computer network. For example, referring to FIGS. **4-5**, in one optional embodiment the gaming device **100** communicates with an award server **200** through a network. More specifically, a gaming device **100** communicates via a gaming device communication device **104** to an award server communication device **204** at an award server **200**. Optionally, the network includes intermediate servers, such as Internet service provider ("ISP") servers, web servers, or the like (not shown).

Referring to FIG. **3**, the award server **200** also communicates with a user device **300**. The user device **300** may take any form, including a personal computer, video game console, mobile phone, tablet device, interactive television, kiosk, or the like. The user device **300** optionally includes a user device processor **302** in communication with a user device memory **310** that stores program instructions executable by the user device processor **302**. Optionally, the user device **300** also includes a user device interface **306**, user device display **308**, and user device communication device **304** in communication with, and under the control of, the user device processor **302**.

Optional embodiments of methods for configuring a system are illustrated in FIGS. **4** and **5**. In one optional embodiment illustrated in FIG. **4**, a system may include a user device **300** in communication with an award server **200** which, in turn, is in communication with a gaming device **100**. As illustrated in FIG. **4**, in an optional embodiment, an award server **200** may be configured to communicate with a plurality of gaming devices **100** and user devices **300** serially and/or simultaneously. In the optional embodiment of FIG. **4**, a user device **300** may be configured to conduct a game application. That is, in one such optional embodiment, the user device memory **310** may store a game application which is executed by the user device processor **302** to produce an outcome which may be displayed at the user device display **308**. The outcome of such a game application may include an escrow award, as discussed in greater detail below.

In one optional embodiment illustrated in FIG. **5**, a system may include a user device **300** in communication with an award server **200** which, in turn, is in communication with a gaming device **100**. Additionally, a user device **300** communicates with a game server **500**. Like the system of FIG. **4**, a system according to the optional embodiment of FIG. **5** may be configured to include a plurality of gaming devices **100** communicating with a game server **500**, as well as a plurality of gaming devices **100** and user devices **300** communicating with an award server **200**. In the optional embodiment of FIG. **5**, a game application may be executed at a game server, with user devices **300** configured merely to display and/or receive input for the remotely executed game application. That is, in one such optional embodiment, the game server **500** executes a game application, and the user device processor **302** receives the outcome of the game application which may be displayed at the user device display **308**. Again, the outcome of such a game application may include an escrow award, as discussed in greater detail below.

Turning to FIGS. **6** and **7**, a method according to an embodiment of the present invention includes conducting a game application. As illustrated in FIG. **6**, the game application may be conducted **600** at a user device **300** or, as illustrated in FIG. **7**, the game application may be conducted **700** at a game server **500** in communication with a user device **300**.

The game application may be a real-money wagering game or a "free-to-play" game. As used in this description, real-money wagering games are games that require a wager that is staked on the outcome of a event which may produce a prize. Examples of real-money wagering games could include social card games (e.g., player-banked card games), video card games (e.g., house-banked card games), slot games, wheel games, dice games, tile games, or the like, in which at least one wager in the form of, or representing, real money is placed on the outcome of the game may result in a prize based on the placement of the wager. It should be noted that real-money wagering games include both chance games and skill games in which a wager (or entry fee) is received and a prize issued to the winner. Examples of skill games that could be conducted as real-money wagering games could include poker tournaments, trivia games, math games, word games, logic puzzles, or the like.

As used in this description, "free-to-play" games are games in which play is free, or is compensated through a means other than wagering. That is, "free" does not necessarily mean uncompensated, since free-to-play games may be paid for by charging a download fee, requiring the player to buy (e.g., spend real money for) game credits, assessing a fee to activate certain features within the free-to-play game, charging a fee to remove advertisements, assessing a subscription fee, or the like. Also, it should be noted that free-to-play games may include both skill games and chance games, so long as either the real-money wager or the prize are eliminated. For example, casino games may be conducted in a free-to-play manner if the wagers are placed using fictional game credits rather than real money or the prizes are issued in fictional game credits rather than real money. Thus, to briefly summarize, real-money wagering games require a real-money wager to be staked on the outcome of the game which may result in a prize, while free-to-play games include any game in which a real-money wager is not received or a prize is not awarded.

Referring again to FIGS. **6** and **7**, an outcome is produced **602** as a result of the conduct of the game application. In an optional embodiment, the outcome is displayed **604** at the user device **300**. Among the outcomes possible in the game application is at least one escrow award. An escrow award is

an award that is not issued by the user device **300** although it may be generated and/or displayed at the user device **300**. It is contemplated that the escrow award may be awarded alone or in combination with another award that is issued by the user device **300**. For example, the user device **300** may display that the game application outcome resulted in an escrow award plus 250 game credits. In such an example, the 250 game credits would be added to available game credits for the game application, whereas the escrow award would be stored at an award server **200**.

The escrow award may take any form. For example, an escrow award may be a quantity, such as $500, a game feature, such as 10 free games, an in-kind award, such as a free airline ticket, or the like. It is also contemplated that the escrow award may be a "mystery" award insofar as the escrow award may be fixed, but not displayed at the user device display **308**. When a determination is made that a game outcome has resulted **606** in an escrow award, the escrow award is stored at an award server **200** rather than being issued at the user device **300**. In this regard, it is contemplated that the escrow award may be communicated from the user device **300** to the award server **200**, from a game server **500** to an award server **200**, or from any other source.

The award server **200** receives and stores **608** an escrow award. In an optional embodiment, the award server **200** incorporates, or communicates with, a database storage device **206** where the escrow award is stored in association with a player identifier. The player identifier may take any form, such as a name, player club number, account name, account number, phone number, device serial number, IP address, email address, or the like. The player identifier may also be associated with a verification means, such as a password, personal identification number ("PIN"), biometric data, or the like. In such an optional embodiment, a player identifier (and verification means, if any) may be received at the user device **300**. When an escrow award is received at the award server **200**, it may be accompanied by the player identifier. Using the player identifier, the escrow award may be stored in a database of player records associated with player identifiers.

In an optional embodiment, player records may be accessible to transfer escrow awards, e.g., share, give, or the like. In one such optional embodiment, in one such optional embodiment, a transfer request may be received at an award server **200**, optionally from a user device **300**. In one example, an escrow award may be shared so that multiple player identifiers may be associated with the escrow award. In such an optional embodiment, a transfer request may include the player identifier of the sharer associated with an escrow award and a player identifier of the sharee. In response to the transfer request to share the escrow award, the award server associates the sharee's player identifier with the escrow award. In another example, an escrow award may be given so that a recipient's player identifier may be associated with the escrow award. In such an optional embodiment, a transfer request may include the player identifier of the giver associated with an escrow award and a player identifier of the recipient. In response to the transfer request to share the escrow award, the award server associates the recipient's player identifier with the escrow award and disassociates the giver's player identifier with the escrow award.

A player record may also include a social media profile. In an optional embodiment, sharing, giving, or announcing escrow awards may be effected through the social media network associated with the social media profile. Such shares, gifts, announcements, or the like may be in addition to, or in place of, requests made directly to the award server **200**.

A gaming device **100**, which is separate from the user device **100** and the award server **200**, receives **610** an escrow award from the award server **200**. As previously discussed, the award server may communicate with the gaming device directly or via a network server. In one optional embodiment, the escrow award is received at the gaming device **100** from the award server **200** in response to input received through the gaming device interface **106**. For example, a player identifier may be entered through the gaming device interface **106** which is transmitted to the award server **200** to retrieve the escrow award(s) associated with the player identifier. As may be appreciated, the player identifier may be entered manually, such as through a keyboard, keypad, button panel, touch-screen, or the like. Alternatively, the player identifier may be read from biometric data, a magnetic stripe card, radio frequency identification ("RFID") transmitter, or the like. In an optional embodiment, input may be received through the gaming device interface **106** to retrieve or decline to retrieve one or more of the escrow awards associated with the player identifier.

At least one escrow award is displayed **612** at the gaming device escrow display **108**. It is contemplated that a plurality of escrow awards may be displayed **612** at the gaming device escrow display **108**. When a plurality of escrow awards is displayed **612** by a gaming device escrow display **108**, the escrow awards may be displayed simultaneously, e.g., on a single screen, or serially, e.g., on multiple different screens. Additionally, the escrow awards available to be won may include: all the escrow awards displayed at the gaming device escrow display **10**; a randomly determined escrow award from the escrow awards displayed at the gaming device escrow display **108**; an escrow award in a predetermined sequence of escrow awards; or the like. In a further optional embodiment, input may be received through a gaming device interface **106** to select the escrow award(s) available to be won. For example, a plurality of escrow awards may be received from an award server **200** and input may be received through a gaming machine interface **106** to determine a sequence of escrow awards, a subset of escrow awards, or a single escrow award from a pool of available escrow awards to be displayed on the escrow display **108** which are eligible to be awarded in the event of a escrow award trigger (as described in greater detail below).

As noted above, the gaming device escrow display **108** may be separate from, or incorporated into, the gaming device primary display **110**. It should be noted that, in one optional embodiment, display of the escrow award on the gaming device escrow display is not a sufficient condition for the gaming device **100** to award the escrow award. That is, in such an optional embodiment, the escrow award displayed at the escrow display is merely a possible award that may be obtained through a gambling game conducted at the gaming device **100**. As discussed in greater detail below, the escrow award may only be awarded upon the occurrence of an escrow award trigger.

A gambling game is conducted **614** at a gaming device **100**. In an optional embodiment, the gambling game is conducted and displayed at a primary display **110** of the gaming device **100**. Optionally, the gambling game includes receipt of input, such as play selections, wager designations, or the like, through a gaming device interface **106**. For example, in one optional embodiment, the gambling game is conducted in response to receipt of a wager. Optionally, the wager (or a designation of the wager) may be received through the gaming device interface **106**. In an optional embodiment, an escrow award feature, i.e., eligibility to win escrow awards through the gaming device **100**, is included in the wager

assessed for the base gambling game. In another optional embodiment, an escrow award feature may require an additional wager or consideration of some form (such as a "sixth coin" to activate the feature, a side bet, or the like).

The gambling game is conducted according to a pre-programmed set of game rules stored at the gaming device memory **112**. Optionally, the gambling game is of a type in which the outcome of the gambling game is dependent, at least in part, on a random number generated by the random number generator. For example, in a gaming device **100** programmed to conduct a card game, the cards dealt may depend, at least in part, on the output of a random number generator. Similarly, in a gaming device conducting a reel slot game, the reel symbols displayed may depend, at least in part, on the output of a random number generator.

In any case, an outcome of the gambling game is used to resolve **616** the gambling game. It is noted that by "outcome," the present invention contemplates any outcome that may be produced in a game. For example, "outcome" may include any occurrence in a game, including a random occurrence, a primary game outcome, or a secondary game outcome that is produced as a result of, contingent upon, or temporally after a primary game outcome is produced. Secondary game outcomes may be produced through such procedures as bonuses for particular outcomes, secondary games, mystery bonuses, random triggers, or any other occurrence apart from the primary game.

A determination is made **618** whether an escrow award trigger has occurred. In one optional embodiment, the escrow award trigger is tied to the outcome or an event in the conduct of a gambling game. For example, an escrow award trigger may include the appearance of a particular game symbol (e.g., playing card, reel symbol, or the like). Similarly, an escrow award trigger may include a particular outcome, such as a particular playing card hand, reel symbol combination, or the like. In an additional or alternate optional embodiment, the escrow award trigger may be a random event that is not tied to the outcome of the game. It is contemplated that the escrow award trigger may occur during a game, before a game, after a game, or at any other time, depending on the optional embodiment. In an optional embodiment in which multiple escrow awards are eligible to be won, different escrow awards may share the same escrow award trigger or may have different escrow award triggers, depending on the optional embodiment.

When an escrow award trigger occurs, the escrow award is issued **620** at the gaming device **100**. As previously noted, the escrow award may take any form. For example, the escrow award may be an amount of money or game credits, a good or service, a game feature (such as free games, games with an enhanced pay table, a second screen or bonus game, or the like), or any other type of prize.

An escrow award may be held at the escrow display **108** until a predetermined occurrence. For example, an escrow award may be held at the escrow display **108** until an escrow display refresh event occurs **622**. An escrow display refresh event may take any form. In one example, an escrow display refresh event occurs when an escrow award trigger occurs. That is, after an escrow award trigger causes the issuance of the escrow award at the gaming device **100**, the escrow display **108** at the gaming device **100** may be refreshed. In another example, an escrow display refresh event may occur after a quantity of games. In one such optional embodiment, the quantity of games is predetermined, e.g., an escrow display refresh event occurs after a fixed quantity of gambling games. In another optional embodiment, the quantity of games is random, e.g., an escrow display refresh event occurs after a randomly determined quantity of gambling games. As may be appreciated, many other types of escrow display refresh events may be defined, including events based on time, outcome(s) of one or more gambling games, events within the gambling game, or the like.

In an optional embodiment, an escrow display refresh event may also include removal of a player identifier from the gaming device **100**. That is, in one optional embodiment, a player identifier is received at a gaming device **100** and escrow awards are received from the award server **200** associated with the received player identifier. In one optional embodiment, the escrow award(s) received from the award server **200** are held at the escrow display **108** of the gaming device **100** until the player identifier is removed from the gaming machine **100**, such as by removing a player rewards card, logging off, or the like. Again, escrow display refresh events may be coupled. For example, in an optional embodiment, an escrow award may be held at an escrow display **108** until a quantity of gambling games has been conducted (whether that quantity is fixed or random) or removal of the player identifier from the gaming device **100**, whichever occurs first. In an optional embodiment, unused games may be lost or saved. That is, in one optional embodiment, if a player identifier is removed from the gaming device **100** with, for example, five games remaining in which to win the escrow award, the escrow award may be disabled, i.e., the five games of eligibility remaining may be lost. In another optional embodiment, the five games may be saved for use on the same or different gaming device **100**. For example, in one such optional embodiment, the records stored at the award server **200** or a database connected thereto may store a record of remaining eligibility of any escrow award that has been partially used. Thus, in such an example, when the escrow award with five games of eligibility remaining is received at the same or different gaming device **100**, the escrow award may be displayed at the escrow display **108** for up to five games (assuming no other escrow display refresh event occurs during those five games).

Additionally, a plurality of escrow display refresh events may be defined and applied. It is contemplated that such escrow display refresh events may be of different types and may be combined in any fashion. For example, in one such optional embodiment, an escrow award may be held at an escrow display **108** for a fixed quantity of gambling games, or a fixed quantity of time, whichever occurs first.

In an optional embodiment, the gaming device escrow display **108** is refreshed **624** after an escrow display refresh event. When the escrow display **108** is refreshed, the escrow display **108** may display a blank screen or, in an alternate optional embodiment in which a plurality of escrow awards are serially displayed (either alone or in batches), another escrow award or subset of escrow awards is displayed from among the escrow awards received from the award server **200**. In an optional embodiment, the determination of which escrow award or subset of escrow awards to display at an escrow display **108** and/or when to display the escrow award at the escrow display **108** may be determined by the gaming device processor **102** by itself or by using input received at the gaming device interface **106**, or a combination thereof. It is also noted that escrow display refresh events may cause a partial refresh of the escrow display **108**. For example, in an optional embodiment, different escrow awards may have different escrow display refresh events associated therewith. In one such optional embodiment, an escrow display refresh event may cause one escrow award displayed at the escrow display **108** to be removed, replaced, or the like, while other escrow awards displayed at the escrow display **108** may

remain on the escrow display **108** until their respective escrow display refresh events occur.

While certain embodiments of the present invention have been shown and described it is to be understood that the present invention is subject to many modifications and changes without departing from the spirit and scope of the claims presented herein.

We claim:

1. A gaming system comprising:

a user device comprising:

a user device processor;

a user device display; and

a user device memory in communication with said user device processor, said user device memory configured to store program instructions executable by said user device processor to display an outcome of a game application at said user device display, wherein said outcome of said game application may include an escrow award which is displayed at said user device without issuing said escrow award at said user device;

an award server in communication with said user device comprising:

an award server processor; and

an award server memory in communication with said award server processor, said award server memory configured to store program instructions executable by said award server processor to receive an escrow award from said user device and store said escrow award in association with a player identifier; and

at least one gaming device in communication with said award server, said at least one gaming device separate from said award server and operating independently from said award server, comprising:

a gaming device processor including a random number generator, said random number generator configured to generate a random number used, at least in part, to generate an outcome for a gambling game;

a gaming device interface in communication with said gaming device processor;

an escrow display in communication with said gaming device processor; and

a gaming device memory in communication with said gaming device processor configured to store at least one escrow award trigger and program instructions executable by said gaming device processor to conduct the steps of:

receiving said escrow award from said award server;

displaying said escrow award on said escrow display;

receiving a wager on said gambling game through said gaming device interface;

conducting said gambling game including randomly selecting an outcome for said gambling game by said gaming device processor;

resolving said wager by said gaming device processor based on said outcome of said gambling game;

determining by said gaming device processor whether said at least one escrow award trigger has occurred; and

issuing said escrow award at said at least one gaming device when said at least one escrow award trigger occurs.

2. The system of claim **1** wherein said instructions executable by said gaming device processor further comprise holding said escrow award at said escrow display until the occurrence of said at least one escrow award trigger.

3. The system of claim **1** wherein said instructions executable by said gaming device processor further comprise:

storing at least one escrow display refresh event in said gaming device memory; and

holding said escrow award at said escrow display until the occurrence of said at least one escrow award trigger or an escrow display refresh event, whichever occurs first.

4. The system of claim **3** wherein said escrow display refresh event includes a predefined quantity of gambling games such that said escrow award is available to be issued for only said predefined quantity of gambling games.

5. The system of claim **3** wherein said escrow display refresh event includes a random quantity of gambling games such that said escrow award is available to be issued for only said random quantity of gambling games.

6. The system of claim **1** wherein said escrow award is associated with a player identifier and said instructions executable by said gaming device processor further comprise:

receiving a player identifier through said gaming device interface such that said escrow award received from said award server is an escrow award associated with said player identifier received at said gaming device;

storing at least one escrow display refresh event in said gaming device memory, wherein said escrow display refresh event includes removal of said player identifier received at said gaming device such that said escrow award is available to be issued only in gambling games conducted while in receipt of said player identifier associated with said escrow award; and

holding said escrow award at said escrow display until the occurrence of said at least one escrow award trigger or an escrow display refresh event, whichever occurs first.

7. The system of claim **1** wherein said at least one escrow award trigger is determined, at least in part, by said outcome of said gambling game generated by said gaming device processor.

8. The system of claim **1** wherein said at least one escrow award trigger is independent of said outcome of said gambling game generated by said gaming device processor.

9. The system of claim **1** wherein said program instructions executable by said award server processor further comprise:

receiving a transfer request at said award server including a first player identifier associated with an escrow award and a second player identifier; and

associating said escrow award with said second player identifier by said award server processor in response to said transfer request.

10. The system of claim **9** wherein said program instructions executable by said award server processor further comprise disassociating said escrow award with said first player identifier by said award server processor in response to said transfer request.

11. A gaming system comprising:

a user device comprising:

a user device processor;

a user device display; and

a user device memory in communication with said user device processor, said user device memory configured to store program instructions executable by said user device processor to display an outcome of a game application at said user device display, wherein said outcome of said game application may include an escrow award which is displayed at said user device without issuing said escrow award at said user device;

an award server in communication with said user device comprising:

an award server processor; and

an award server memory in communication with said award server processor, said award server memory

configured to store program instructions executable by said award server processor to receive an escrow award from said user device and store said escrow award in association with a player identifier; and

at least one gaming device in communication with said award server, said at least one gaming device separate from said award server and operating independently from said award server, comprising:

a gaming device processor including a random number generator, said random number generator configured to generate a random number used, at least in part, to generate an outcome for a gambling game;

a gaming device interface in communication with said gaming device processor;

an escrow display in communication with said gaming device processor; and

a gaming device memory in communication with said gaming device processor configured to store at least one escrow award trigger and program instructions executable by said gaming device processor to conduct the steps of:

receiving said escrow award from said award server;

displaying said escrow award on said escrow display and holding said escrow award at said escrow display until at least the occurrence of said at least one escrow award trigger;

receiving a wager on said gambling game through said gaming device interface;

conducting said gambling game including randomly selecting an outcome for said gambling game by said gaming device processor;

resolving said wager by said gaming device processor based on said outcome of said gambling game;

determining by said gaming device processor whether said at least one escrow award trigger has occurred; and

issuing said escrow award at said at least one gaming device when said at least one escrow award trigger occurs.

12. The system of claim **11** wherein said instructions executable by said gaming device processor further comprise:

storing at least one escrow display refresh event in said gaming device memory;

holding said escrow award at said escrow display until the occurrence of said at least one escrow award trigger or an escrow display refresh event, whichever occurs first; and

removing said escrow award from said escrow display upon the occurrence of said at least one escrow award trigger or an escrow display refresh event, whichever occurs first.

13. The system of claim **12** wherein said escrow display refresh event includes a predefined quantity of gambling games such that said escrow award is available to be issued for only said predefined quantity of gambling games.

14. The system of claim **12** wherein said escrow display refresh event includes a random quantity of gambling games such that said escrow award is available to be issued for only said random quantity of gambling games.

15. The system of claim **11** wherein said escrow award is associated with a player identifier and said instructions executable by said gaming device processor further comprise:

receiving a player identifier through said gaming device interface such that said escrow award received from said award server is an escrow award associated with said player identifier received at said gaming device;

storing at least one escrow display refresh event in said gaming device memory, wherein said escrow display refresh event includes removal of said player identifier received at said gaming device such that said escrow award is available to be issued only in gambling games conducted while in receipt of said player identifier associated with said escrow award;

holding said escrow award at said escrow display until the occurrence of said at least one escrow award trigger or an escrow display refresh event, whichever occurs first; and

removing said escrow award from said escrow display upon the occurrence of said at least one escrow award trigger or an escrow display refresh event, whichever occurs first.

16. The system of claim **11** wherein said escrow award trigger is determined, at least in part, by said outcome of said gambling game generated by said gaming device processor.

17. The system of claim **11** wherein said escrow award trigger is independent of said outcome of said gambling game generated by said gaming device processor.

18. The system of claim **11** wherein said program instructions executable by said award server processor further comprise:

receiving a transfer request at said award server including a first player identifier associated with an escrow award and a second player identifier; and

associating said escrow award with said second player identifier by said award server processor in response to said transfer request.

19. The system of claim **18** wherein said program instructions executable by said award server processor further comprise disassociating said escrow award with said first player identifier by said award server processor in response to said transfer request.

20. A gaming system comprising:

a user device comprising:

a user device processor;

a user device display; and

a user device memory in communication with said user device processor, said user device memory configured to store program instructions executable by said user device processor to display an outcome of a game application at said user device display, wherein said outcome of said game application may include an escrow award which is displayed at said user device without issuing said escrow award at said user device;

an award server in communication with said user device comprising:

an award server processor; and

an award server memory in communication with said award server processor, said award server memory configured to store program instructions executable by said award server processor to receive an escrow award amount from said user device and store said escrow award amount in association with a player identifier; and

at least one gaming device in communication with said award server, said at least one gaming device separate from said award server and operating independently from said award server, comprising:

a gaming device processor including a random number generator, said random number generator configured to generate a random number used, at least in part, to generate an outcome for a gambling game;

a gaming device interface in communication with said gaming device processor;

an escrow display in communication with said gaming device processor; and

a gaming device memory in communication with said gaming device processor configured to store at least one escrow award trigger, at least one escrow display refresh event, and program instructions executable by said gaming device processor to conduct the steps of:

receiving a player identifier through said gaming device interface;

receiving said escrow award from said award server associated with said player identifier received at said gaming device;

displaying said escrow award on said escrow display and holding said escrow award at said escrow display until the occurrence of said at least one escrow award trigger or an escrow display refresh event, whichever occurs first;

receiving a wager on said gambling game through said gaming device interface;

conducting said gambling game including randomly selecting an outcome for said gambling game by said gaming device processor;

resolving said wager by said gaming device processor based on said outcome of said gambling game;

determining by said gaming device processor whether said at least one escrow award trigger has occurred;

issuing said escrow award at said at least one gaming device when said at least one escrow award trigger occurs;

determining by said gaming device processor whether said escrow display refresh event has occurred; and

removing said escrow award from said escrow display when said escrow display refresh event occurs.

21. The system of claim **20** wherein said escrow award trigger is determined, at least in part, by said outcome of said gambling game generated by said gaming device processor.

22. The system of claim **20** wherein said escrow award trigger is independent of said outcome of said gambling game generated by said gaming device processor.

23. The system of claim **20** wherein said program instructions executable by said award server processor further comprise:

receiving a transfer request at said award server including a first player identifier associated with an escrow award and a second player identifier; and

associating said escrow award with said second player identifier by said award server processor in response to said transfer request.

24. The system of claim **23** wherein said program instructions executable by said award server processor further comprise disassociating said escrow award with said first player identifier by said award server processor in response to said transfer request.

25. The system of claim **20** wherein said escrow display refresh event includes a predefined quantity of gambling games such that said escrow award is available to be issued for only said predefined quantity of gambling games.

26. The system of claim **20** wherein said escrow display refresh event includes a random quantity of gambling games such that said escrow award is available to be issued for only said random quantity of gambling games.

27. The system of claim **20** wherein said escrow display refresh event includes removal of said player identifier such that said escrow award is available to be issued only in gambling games conducted while in receipt of said player identifier associated with said escrow award.

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